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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE *(Dec. 17, 2012)*

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – As Patterson Park Community Center counts down to its 10th anniversary next October, much has changed.

And, if you ask the man who has overseen the center for nearly all those years, the changes have very much been for the better.

Steady at the helm for most all of Patterson's 10 years, come next October, has been Superintendent Tom Sage, a veteran of the parks and recreation industry whose guidance has led to numerous state and national industry awards for successes in each of the center's rich and diverse programming areas.

Patterson Park Community Center, 521 Mercury Blvd., fairly bristles with amenities including two gymnasiums – one for adults and one for youth, a 1/8-mile indoor walking and running track, a versatile aerobics that provides space for a wide variety of affordable yet professionally-taught dance classes to participants from toddlers to senior citizens; a wellness center that features state-of-the-art exercise and fitness equipment; a large game room, a versatile, 'best-deal-in-town' conference center that offers up to three meeting rooms, a commercial kitchen and a dining room; two regulation racquetball courts, a 305-seat theater where professional-grade lighting and high-tech sound systems can accommodate the center's show-biz theatre arts programming, an arts and crafts room and an indoor pool with a 25-yard lap lane area, an interactive play system and a triple-loop water slide.

This vast array of top-notch gear only enhances the center's main missions – offering the widest variety of programming possible to the widest range of age groups and demographics.

When he hired on, Sage said, the lack of structure in the center's programming changed and, with help from a wide range of partners such as Vanderbilt University, city and county school systems, MPRD, MTSU, Murfreesboro Housing Authority, the Guidance Center and many, many others, that structure began to bear fruit to the extent that for the seventh year in a row, Patterson was awarded the Donald H. Stanton award during this past summer's Tennessee Recreation and Parks Association annual convention.

An important part of the criteria is how well a recreational center is able to reach out into its surroundings and provide programs its clientele – especially its inner-city

clientele – wants and needs, Sage said, and a vast array of partners help make that happen.

The center's facilities are available to anyone, Sage said, and rental fees are competitive. The facility can handle a wide range of events such as corporate meetings, associational meetings and more private events like family reunions.

"We have several facilities here that can be rented," he said. "We have the swimming pool, the theatre, banquet facilities for over 400 and the outside shelters.

"We can rent specific venues or we can combine them into one package," he continued. "Our Rec Connection publication and our section of the city's website, www.murfreesborotn.gov/parks, are good resources for what we have available.

Success builds on success and new programs continue to be added, Sage said.

"We're working with Read to Succeed to help expand its pre-school programming in places like Franklin Heights," he said. "That requires parents and children to be here so you have to make it convenient (for them to attend).

"If you don't make it convenient for them," he continued, "there's a very small chance they will all come."

Kids who live in the inner city often don't have the resources to make good choices and face different issues than their suburban counterparts, Sage said.

"I do think that kids who grow up in the inner-city have a different set of issues to deal with," Sage said. "They have a tough time making good choices."

So what does Tom Sage see when he looks in his crystal ball?

"We need to stay relevant," he said. "We need to pay attention to what works here and what doesn't so we can satisfy the center's mission and accommodate the community's needs," he said. "We need to maintain and strengthen the long-term partnerships that have proven helpful to our mission.

"We have a growing ethnic population," he added, "and I'd like to see us have more diverse cultural groups using the center; to see them be able to move in and out of this center comfortably.

"If we pay attention and stay relevant," he predicted, "we will continue to provide a valuable community service that gives taxpayers the biggest bang for their bucks."